

*AUCTORITAS*: PERSONAL AUTHORITY IN THE PLAYS OF PLAUTUS AND  
TERENCE

A Thesis  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

### *AUCTORITAS*: PERSONAL AUTHORITY IN THE PLAYS OF PLAUTUS AND TERENCE. (December 2010)

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This project seeks to explore the nature of the Roman social construction of *auctoritas* and how a Roman male achieves it. *Auctoritas* roughly translates to personal authority in English, but the concept behind the word is much more complicated. There are both personal and political shades of meaning to the word, but both are tied together in a way that the modern concept of authority simply does not connote. Simply put, authority, both legal and personal, could rest in any man in any given community assuming that man was respected enough in said community.

A man gained that standing and *auctoritas* through the competent administration of his property, as judged by the community. In the Roman world, administering a man's property included maintaining his material possessions, competently handling business dealings, controlling spending habits, and even tightly controlling his family's conduct. All these things contributed to a man's worthiness in the eyes of his community and correlated directly to his right to *auctoritas* within the community.

This project will utilize the comedic stage plays of Plautus and Terence as primary sources. These were chosen for two reasons: first, because they are some of the only Roman

primary sources in existence that depict the every-day lives of the Roman people. The plays themselves are always set in the street and constructed as though they are the public showings of private lives, which makes them perfect for examining the personal aspect of *auctoritas*. Secondly, these plays were written with the average Roman citizen in mind as an audience, Plautus more so than Terence, but even Terence wrote for the common people occasionally. This means that the plays were constructed with the conventions of Roman society in mind, as they would not have been so popular with the people had they seemed foreign or unrelatable. Thus, these plays offer readers a much better idea of what Roman societal conventions were than the bombast of Cicero or the high-minded moralistic philosophy of the Stoics. Even Livy and Tacitus prove less capable of unveiling the basics of Roman society than the plays of Plautus and Terence; the great Roman historians were far more interested in major events and big names than describing the everyday customs and practices of the Roman people. By scouring the pages of Roman comedies and focusing on the personal interactions between characters, much can be learned about the conventions of Roman society, including *auctoritas*.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

*Auctoritas* is a word which has no cognate in English. The concept embodied in the word *auctoritas* is as idiosyncratic as anything in Latin and the Roman world. Historian Kathleen McCarthy described this Roman idea as the “continuum of practices of authority,” and further elaborated, “*Auctoritas* consists above all in the idea that the subordinate’s will is in compliance, not just his or her actions.”<sup>1</sup> Classicist Karl Galinsky stated, “*Auctoritas* is something that is not granted by statute but by the esteem of one’s fellow citizens. It is acquired less by inheritance, although belonging to an influential family or group is accompanied by some degree of *auctoritas*, than by an individual’s superior record of judgment and achievement. Again, *auctoritas* is not static but keeps increasing...by continual activity of the kind that merits and validates one’s *auctoritas*.”<sup>2</sup> Thus *auctoritas* is not analogous to the modern conception of authority, which implies an impersonal power that is conferred from something greater than personal respect. *Auctoritas* is instead a facet of personal and communal relationships. More importantly, *auctoritas* is not power forced on others, but rather the power given to men by the public. *Auctoritas* is best defined as the level at which each man has the right to rule over his own household and others in the community. “Rule” is not exactly the right word, *auctoritas* does not imply absolute

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen McCarthy, *Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in Plautine Comedy* (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 200), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 14.

authority, but it is something more than simply “influence.”<sup>3</sup> The best short English translation of *auctoritas* is personal authority.

Much has been made in scholarship about the political aspect of *auctoritas*. Political theorist Hannah Arendt used the concept of *auctoritas* as the way to bridge the gap between the Roman and U.S. political systems, explaining:

The very concept of Roman authority suggests that the act of foundation inevitably develops its own stability and permanence, and authority in this context is nothing more or less than a kind of necessary ‘augmentation’ by virtue of which all innovations and changes remain tied back to the foundation which, at the same time, they augment and increase. Thus the amendments to the Constitution augment and increase the original foundations of the American public.<sup>4</sup>

Arendt’s view is heavily concentrated on the wider legal ramifications of the concept of *auctoritas* and fails to address the way in which *auctoritas* operated as a facet of social interaction in the Roman world.

But how is *auctoritas* acquired? How does it slip away? What are the tangible expressions of *auctoritas*? These are the central questions of this study. To that end, the plays of the two most famous Roman playwrights in history, Plautus and Terence, will form the primary source body scrutinized to answer these questions. Plautus and Terence offer a perspective on Roman life that few other primary sources can. There are other roughly contemporaneous playwrights from the Roman world: Quintus Ennius, Marcus Pacuvius, and Statius Caecilius, to name a few. Unfortunately, what remains of their works is fragmentary at best. Therefore, the six plays of Terence and the twenty-one plays of Plautus

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<sup>3</sup> Theodor Mommsen described the suggestive power of *auctoritas* as “more than advice and less than command, an advice which one may not safely ignore.” Theodor Mommsen, *Romisches Staatsrecht*, Vol. 3, chapter 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2214.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 203.



must serve as our representation of Roman comedy.<sup>5</sup> They show the personal relationships and daily lives of Roman citizens. Such information is vitally crucial to studying *auctoritas*, since it only exists on a personal level. Just as important to this study is the necessity of communal observation in Roman comedy. All the plays of Plautus and Terence take place in the street. Obviously, there are practical reasons for this, but many of these plays could just as easily be set in one family's house as they tend to revolve around one person or family. However, setting these plays in private would completely negate the subversive/expressive dynamic of power and *auctoritas* which characterizes the relationships between masters and slaves, husbands and wives, men and prostitutes, etc. For instance, a wife arguing with her husband within their own house where no one can see or hear is simply an argument. The fact that a wife disagrees with her husband or is unwilling to comply with his wishes is not particularly meaningful or surprising (at all). But if a wife argues with her husband in the street, that argument is now a willful subversion of the husband's authority and a direct attack on his standing in the community. This dynamic is true of all interactions portrayed in Roman comedy; it was understood that these actions took place with either the approval or censure of the public and a corresponding gain/loss of personal authority to the men involved.

The plays of Plautus and Terence allow for an examination of the mechanisms of *auctoritas* on multiple levels. Firstly, how *auctoritas* operated in the relationship between men and their communities. What were the characteristics generally ascribed to men who possessed supreme *auctoritas*? How did morality and personal authority overlap? What did

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<sup>5</sup> John Barsby, editor and translator, *Terence V.I-II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). All translations of Terence are by John Barsby unless otherwise noted. Paul Nixon, editor and translator, *Plautus* (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1938). All translations of Plautus are by Paul Nixon unless otherwise noted.

the public expect of men with high *auctoritas*? These will be the questions explored in the first chapter. The second chapter will focus on personal relationships and *auctoritas*. How did personal authority operate inside marriages and how did marital interactions influence a man's *auctoritas*? How did prostitution affect *auctoritas*? The third chapter will focus on physical expressions of personal authority. How did *auctoritas* interact with sexuality? How was violence used to enforce or obtain standing in the community? How was rape, as the point of intersection between sex and violence, related to personal authority?

The extent to which one can extrapolate Roman sociological data from Plautus and Terence has been a hotly debated topic in classicism. While they represent roughly contemporaneous bodies of work and both wrote in the same genre and for, more or less, the same audience, Plautus and Terence are rarely presented as a monolithic representation of Roman comedy. Plautus's contributions to his own plays are the subject of conjecture and skepticism while Terence is often lauded as the finest Roman playwright of extant work. This binary opposition of perception, the pandering comedic hack (Plautus) versus the brilliant yet unappreciated artist ahead of his time (Terence), often colored the scholarship surrounding these playwrights. Only in the last thirty odd years have literary critics and historians come to appreciate the talent of Plautus and reconsider the previously held notion that he was little more than a translator with a taste for bawdy jokes. Moreover, as will become clear, the plays of Plautus and Terence, though largely based on Greek originals, went well beyond translation and were structured more as counterpoints to their base material than just reiterations in a new language.

First, the much-maligned Plautus. Horace, writing little more than a century after Plautus's death, began the tradition of deriding Plautus as a talentless purveyor of opiates for the masses:

*adspice Plautus...quam non adstricto percurrat pulpit socco.  
Gestit enim nummum in loculos demittere, post hoc securus  
cadat an recto stet fibula talo.*

See how slipshod is Plautus as he hurries across the boards—he is eager to drop cash into his purse, and then he cares nothing whether his play tumbles or stands upright.<sup>6</sup>

Thus began a characterization of Plautus that would persevere through to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> As late as 1963, critics still spouted sophomoric vitriol at the idea of Plautus as an artist, smacking of snobbish aficionados rather than high-minded scholars. Consider this passage from Gilbert Norwood's study *Plautus and Terence*:

The construction of some of [Plautus's] plays is so incredibly bad that even stupidity alone, even ignorance alone, even indifference alone, seem insufficient to explain it. We can suppose that he neither knew nor cared what a drama is, and he was concerned with nothing save to amuse an audience that knew and cared not indeed less, but no more.<sup>8</sup>

However, even as Norwood bemoaned the ineptitude of Plautus's writing, he admitted that the majority of Plautus's artistic output was original writing and bore little resemblance to the Greek plays on which they were based.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Horace, *Epistles*, quoted in Gilbert Norwood, *Plautus and Terence* (New York: Cooper Square Publishing, 1963), 19.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the treatment of Plautus down through the ages, see Niall Slater, *Plautus in Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 1-18. See also, Alison Sharrock, *Reading Roman Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 96-162.

<sup>8</sup> Norwood, *Plautus and Terence*, 19. For further negative sentiment on the artistry of Plautus, see T.B.L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> "The genuinely Greek passages should be distinguished from the far larger bulk where the original has been smothered by barbarous clownery, intolerable verbosity, and an almost complete indifference to dramatic structure." Norwood, *Plautus and Terence*, 28.

Few would argue with the criticism that Plautine plays were riddled with structural issues, but scholars such as Norwood who saw that flaw as a reason to dismiss Plautus as a monumental figure in Latin literature missed the point of Plautus's work. As Horace astutely observed in the earlier quote, Plautus wrote for money. He was the first (recorded) professional playwright. Having been born free in northern Italy around 254 BCE, Plautus never worked for a specific patron and lived on his popularity with the masses.<sup>10</sup> His goal was not to write plays which conformed to the accepted standard of dramatic structure, nor did he intend to comment on the pressing political or social issues of his day. Plautus wrote for the sole purpose of entertainment. If a pivotal scene could be altered to induce more laughter at the expense of pacing or its coherence inside the overall structure of the play, so be it. This willingness to sacrifice structure and convention for comedic effect made Plautus far more than the conduit through which Greek plays came to the Romans. As Roman comedic scholar Erich Segal noted, "Like Shakespeare and Moliere, Plautus begs, borrows, and steals from every conceivable source—including himself. But once the play begins, all literary debts are cancelled and everything is 100 percent Plautus."<sup>11</sup>

Terence, by contrast, found far more favor in posterity. Gilbert Norwood, who so easily dismissed the work of Plautus as "barbarous clownery," ended his introduction to Terence with this flourish of praise: "For sheer enjoyment, the quiet enduring relish we feel for that specially loved band, the artists who seem to transcend ourselves not infinitely, Terence is unsurpassed...Let us endeavour to describe his excellence."<sup>12</sup> Though such

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<sup>10</sup> Erich Segal, *Roman Laughter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Erich Segal, ed. *Oxford Readings in Menander, Plautus, and Terence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxi. For an in-depth comparison between a Plautine play and its Greek counterpart, see E.W. Handley, *Menander and Plautus: A Study in Comparison* (London: H.K. Lewis and Co., 1968). For a more general look at the differences between Greek and Plautine plays, see Eduard Fraenkel, *Plautine Elements in Plautus*, trans. Tomas Drevikosky and Frances Muecke, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Norwood, *Plautus and Terence*, 120.

effusive and unabashed admiration is not common, the breadth of scholarship on Terence compared to that of Plautus illustrates a simple truth: critics and scholars have found Terence far more worthy of academic attention than Plautus.<sup>13</sup> This divergence in opinion and attention can be largely attributed to the sharply contrasting styles of the two playwrights.

Terence was born in the vicinity of 195 BCE in northern Africa, possibly Carthage. He came to Rome as a slave and was freed at some point during his life.<sup>14</sup> The nature of his relationship with his master and the possibility of collaboration with members of the “Scipionic Circle” has been debated throughout history with the spectrum of allegations ranging from Terence being a literary pseudonym for Scipio Aemilianus to Terence being subsidized by a group of rich, aristocratic theater enthusiasts.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the degree to which they were involved, every source on the life of Terence indicated that he was intimately acquainted with many leading political figures and social elites of his day, and that Terence received considerable patronage from them.<sup>16</sup> His living must have at least partially come from these patrons as he never enjoyed the overwhelming popularity of Plautus.<sup>17</sup>

Terence’s origin and expected audience were likely factors that contributed to his distinctly un-Plautine style. Where Plautus employed lengthy, quip-laden monologues, irreverent characterizations, and gave little thought to his frantic, disjointed structure;

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<sup>13</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of the academic treatment of Terence, see Walter Forehand, *Terence* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985). Interestingly, in recent years Plautus has become a much larger figure in classicism and Terence has become the forgotten man for the last thirty years or so of Roman comedic scholarship.

<sup>14</sup> Forehand, *Terence*, 1-5.

<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth examination of the Scipionic Circle and Terence’s relation to them, see Sander M. Goldberg, *Understanding Terence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 5-15.

<sup>16</sup> Forehand, *Terence*, 3-7.

<sup>17</sup> Terence’s *Hecyra* is perhaps the most notorious flop in the ancient world. Its first performance ended halfway through because the theater had emptied. The second performance abruptly closed when it was announced a gladiatorial exhibition was beginning next door and the crowd rushed to see it. The play was not even performed in its entirety until its third performance and there is no recording of it ever being revived in Rome after Terence’s death. Segal, *Oxford Readings in Menander, Plautus, and Terence*, xxiii. Alternately, simply attaching the name of Plautus to any play could guarantee a packed house, as there were at least 130 plays of alleged Plautine origin circulating a full century after Plautus’s death. Segal, *Roman Laughter*, 2.

Terence used subdued, streamlined dialogue, very little slapstick humor or overtly sexual quips, and meticulously crafted plots. Terence also more closely conformed to the Greek plays on which he based his own work.<sup>18</sup> However, in spite of the seemingly conventional nature of Terentian comedy, Terence's work represented ingenuity and the ability to stand convention on its head while simultaneously celebrating it.

An example of Terence ironically celebrating convention is the character of Parmeno from Terence's *Hecyra*. Parmeno serves as the slave of Pamphilus, and is characterized early in the play as the *servus callidus*, or the wiley servant. The *servus callidus* is a common stock character throughout Roman comedy and could be found in nearly every Plautine play. Typically this character schemes for his master and brings about the ultimate resolution of the play. The *Hecyra* begins no differently; in the first act, Parmeno explains that Pamphilus is unsatisfied with his wife and that he, Parmeno, has been charged with the task of finding a way for his master to dissolve the marriage without offending his wife's father. However, as the play develops, it becomes clear that Pamphilus has charged Parmeno with this task simply to keep him away from the real action of the play. Throughout the play, Parmeno returns to his master only to be sent off on another hopeless errand. In the end, Parmeno actually provides the possibility for resolution but only by accident, causing him to remark at the end of the play, *equidem plus hodie boni feci imprudens quam sciens ante hunc diem umquam*. "Truly, I've done more good today unwittingly than I've ever done on purpose

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<sup>18</sup> For a (bewilderingly thorough) textual analysis and comparison of Terence's works and the Greek originals, see Evangelos Karakasis, *Terence and the Language of Roman Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

before.”<sup>19</sup> This sort of innovation, though markedly less blatant than that employed by Plautus, was no less a departure from the Greek originals.

Ultimately, both playwrights elaborated extensively on their Greek source material. Pleasing their Roman audiences, whether plebian or patrician, was the primary task of both Plautus and Terence. In doing so, both injected Roman values, culture, and humor into their plays. Translation is hardly sufficient to describe this process and even adaptation is not enough; Plautus and Terence engaged in reinterpretation and the resulting plays were uniquely Roman, whatever their antecedents.

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<sup>19</sup> Terence, *Hecyra*, l. 879-880. This characterization of the slave, Parmeno, is entirely a Terentian invention. The Greek original, a play by Appollodorus of Carystus, casts the slave as much more actively engaged in the action of the play.

## Chapter 2

### The Roman Male Character

#### Introduction

In Roman comedy, men of *auctoritas* were men who effectively administrated, protected, and added to their own property. Every social interaction constituted a small battle over territorial rights, every insult a direct challenge to another man's ability to maintain his fiefdom. Of course, gauging a man's ability to see to his affairs can only be judged on the basis of what is known to the public. Accordingly, there were explicit ideas throughout Plautine and Terentian comedy about the proper attributes of the Roman male character; at least, that character which a man makes known to the public.

Clearly the most important element of the Roman male character was morality. There exists studies of Roman morality, but they tend to focus on the more philosophical or religious aspects without consideration for what the average Roman citizen considered moral or immoral.<sup>20</sup> None of these works draw on Roman comedy as a source for ideas on Roman morality, despite the fact that these sources create a clearer picture of Roman mindset than any other source available. Scholarship on Roman civic duty also suffers from a similar

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<sup>20</sup> Runar Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), also G.E.R. Lloyd, *Science and Morality in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), also Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1988).



malady; most studies are on the nature of attaining Roman citizenship and the laws regarding citizenship, and not the expectations of citizens to actually perform civic duties.<sup>21</sup>

The subject of gender construction as it pertains to the ideal Roman character yields more relevant scholarship than the previous two subjects. Erik Gunderson's *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World* offers a wealth of knowledge about the many things a man could do to appear unmanly in front of a crowd.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, Gunderson largely draws on the work of Cicero and other late-Republic/Empire sources and neglects to consider the possibilities of examining stagecraft as a form of rhetoric or an expression of masculinity in a public setting. Craig Williams' excellent study *Roman Homosexuality*, though it focuses more on the various forms of Roman sexuality than on gender construction, draws extensively on Roman poets and playwrights, including Plautus.<sup>23</sup> However, Williams only uses Plautus sparingly and uses Terence not at all. These omissions constitute a serious gap in his research and a lost opportunity to examine a rich source of information on the nature of Roman gender construction.

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<sup>21</sup> Of these, by far the most instructive is Jane Garder, *Being a Roman Citizen* (New York: Routledge, 1993). See also David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Duckworth, 2000), also Randall Howarth, *The Origins of Roman Citizenship* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), also Adrian Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), also Claude Nicolet, *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome*, trans. by P.S. Falla (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> Erik Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Williams even reserved a section in his book for a discussion on the usefulness of Plautine comedy in making assertions about distinctly Roman practices and concluded: "It is an obvious fact, but one worth recalling, that Plautus wrote to draw laughs from a Roman audience, and it is their perspective on the world that his characters so often adopt." Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 36.

## Section I: Moral Fortitude

By attaching stigmas to slothful and socially unproductive behaviors, Plautus and Terence fashioned a moral code that focused on keeping men active, productive members of society and disapproved of unnecessary entanglements like love affairs. This was especially true of older men; it was particularly scandalous for older men to engage in trifling affairs. Male characters that adhered strictly to this moral code possessed considerable *auctoritas* and those that did not were penalized accordingly. Of course, nearly every situation in Roman comedy is an example of what not to do, rather than an exemplar of socially acceptable action. Therefore, there are scarce few examples of people actually conforming to the moral code of Roman comedy, though there are some soliloquies on the subject.

Terence and Plautus presented the prototypical Roman man as one that aspired to fortune and the respect and admiration of his peers. As the protagonist of Plautus's *Trinummus* proclaims, *boni sibi haec expetunt, rem, fidem, honorem, gloriam et gratiam: hoc probis pretium est*. "It's wealth and confidence and esteem, fame and public favour that good men seek for: these are the prizes probity brings."<sup>24</sup> Male characters in Roman comedy were expected to attain respect and fortune through abstemious lifestyle choices. Perhaps the most common and punishable offense throughout the works of Plautus and Terence was the sin of intemperance. Any character attempting to indulge his desires was destined to come to a bad end. Moreover, other characters commonly bemoaned the extravagant lifestyles of certain people while praising the moderate attitude of others. In Plautus's *Asinaria*, a woman finds out that her husband has been carrying on an extensive affair with another married woman and cries, *At scelestus ego praeter alios meum virum frugi rata, siccum, frugi, continentem,*

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<sup>24</sup> Plautus, *Trinummus*, p.123, l. 273-274.

*amantem uxoris maxime*. “I thought my husband was the very paragon of men, a sober man, a worthy, moral man that loves his wife devotedly,” and a few lines later declares that she finally see’s him for what he truly is and berates him for being an adulterer and a “toping man” (meaning an alcoholic).<sup>25</sup> The wife’s invective was centered on her husband’s display of immoderation and unchecked desires. The father in Terence’s *Andria* notes that his son has been keeping the company of some ruffians and prostitutes and proudly opines, *enimvero spectatum satis putabam et magnum exemplum continentiae. nam qui cum ingeniis conflictatur eiusmodi neque commovetur animus in ea rat amen, scias posse habere iam ipsum suae vitae modum*. “I supposed he had come through the test and proved himself a fine model of self-restraint. When a man is involved with characters like that and doesn’t fall to temptation, you can be sure that he is now capable of taking control over his own life.”<sup>26</sup> The father is exceedingly proud that his son has managed to maintain self-control despite being confronted with the opportunity to indulge in frivolous and hedonistic behaviors.

These depictions demonstrate the Roman comedic moral structure. Men who fail to show sobriety in their decision-making are morally corrupt and therefore cannot hope to improve themselves or earn the respect of their peers. A vignette from Terence’s *Eunuchus* illustrates this point. A freeborn citizen walks up to some other characters and relates,

*conveni hodie adveniens quondam mei loci hinc atque ordinis,  
hominem haud impurum, itidem patria qui abligurrierat bona.  
video sentum, squalidum, aegrum, pannis annisque obsitum.  
“oh! quid istuc” inquam “ornatist?” “ quoniam miser quod  
habui perdi, em quo redactus sum, omnes noti me atque  
amici deserunt.” hic ego illum contempsi prae me.*

<sup>25</sup> Plautus, *Asinaria*, p. 217, l. 856-859. Keep in mind, this wife is merely angry that her husband is carousing with other women; she is not actually accusing him of adultery which, in the Roman world, could only happen between a man and a married woman. Since her husband is seeing prostitutes, there is no “real” adultery here.

<sup>26</sup> Terence, *Andria*, p. 59, l. 91-95.

On my way here today I met a person of my own rank and station, a decent enough fellow, who had, like me, guzzled away his inheritance. He looked unkempt, dirty, sick, shabbily dressed, and senile. “Oh!” I said, “What sort of get up is that?” “I’ve lost what I had, unfortunately, and look what I’m reduced to. I’m abandoned by my friends and acquaintances.” I was full of contempt for him as compared to myself.<sup>27</sup>

Instead of feeling pity at the plight of a fellow citizen who has also succumbed to alcoholism, the protagonist loathes the homeless man for his inability to maintain self-control and make a success of himself.

Romantic and overly affectionate relationships constituted the most undesirable form of intemperance. Many characters throughout Plautus and Terence viewed open affection with suspicion and scorn. In Plautus’s *Stichus*, the eponymous character and a slave are drinking together and the slave tries to kiss his lover at the table. Stichus comments, *Prostibilest tandem? stantem stanti savium dare amicum amicae?* “Hey, you! Think she’s an...alley strumpet? The idea of a man giving his girl a...nice, long kiss, and both...standing up!”<sup>28</sup> Stichus becomes perturbed by the affection the slave is showing for his paramour in public. There is an important distinction to be made here. In modern constructions of morality, open displays of affection which imply sexual contact are deemed unacceptable. However, in Plautus and Terence, it was the actual emotion flowing between the two lovers that represented a transgression against morality. The moral code basically prohibited love. At the beginning of the second act of Plautus’s *Trinummus*, the character Lysiteles gives an extensive monologue about the proper behavior of a man and at one point exclaims,

*numquam Amor quemquam nisi cupidum hominem postulat se  
in plagas conicere...subdole ab re consulit, blandiloquentulus,  
harpago, mednax, cuppes, avarus, elegans, despolitar,  
latebricolarum hominum corruptor, inops celatum indagator.*

<sup>27</sup> Terence, *Eunuchus*, p. 339, l. 234-239.

<sup>28</sup> Plautus, *Stichus*, p. 93, l. 762-763.

*nam qui amat quod amat quom extemplo saviis sagittatis  
perculsust, ilico res foras labitur, liquitur.*

Love never hopes to have anyone come dashing into his nets except men of loose desires...[Love] gives them sly counsel, he is wheedle-tongued and predacious, lying, deliciating, grasping, luxurious; he is a despoiler, a corrupter of men into bawdyhousehunters, and when out of funds he sniffs out secrets. The moment your lover is pierced by those barbed and blissful kisses of the one he loves, his property begins to slip and drip away.<sup>29</sup>

Lysiteles's diatribe explains a great deal about Roman conceptions of love.

Emotional attachment between people was a useless dalliance, an extravagance that could not be afforded by anyone attempting to be successful by Roman standards. Also, as indicated in the quote above, Terence and Plautus clearly saw love as a means of manipulation; men who had fallen in love were in the power of women and not in control of themselves. What could be more shameful to a Roman man than to fall into the power of a woman, who had a position in society barely higher than a slave? Most importantly, when a Roman man allowed himself to be fettered with the bonds of love, he risked his property and livelihood. Considering that the moral code was constructed with the purpose of keeping Roman men active and productive, and that the Romans saw romantic entanglements as a major threat to productivity, it seems only logical that they would attach stigmas to love and overt affection.

Plautus was particularly scornful of older men who indulged in love affairs. While young men were certainly expected to maintain sobriety and self-control, Plautus portrayed older men who indulged in love affairs as the most despicable of all offenders. In Plautus's *Casina*, a woman catches her husband as he is about to meet his lover and comments, *Eho tu nihili, cana culex...senecta aetate unguentatus per vias, ignave, incedis?* "You good-for-nothing, you hoary-headed gnat...A creature of your time of life promenading the streets all

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<sup>29</sup> Plautus, *Trinummus*, p. 121, l. 234-244.

perfumed, you useless thing!”<sup>30</sup> This propensity for heaping scorn on older men who showed affection or dallied in romantic relationships clearly indicated how Plautus expected a man’s priorities to align as he got older. As a wizened, experienced Roman, the older man should already have the probity and temperance necessary to avoid such entanglements and should be a paradigm of sobriety to younger men. Also, older men had established themselves in the Roman economy and had, presuming some level of success, much more to lose than younger men in terms of property and financial assets. Any Roman man that would risk his livelihood for something as insubstantial as love deserved severe censure. Therefore, the older Roman male who allowed himself to indulge in love affairs committed a much more egregious moral transgression than a younger man who had little to lose in the first place.

By riddling their plays with instances of intemperate men falling into ruin and men who exhibited sobriety succeeding in their endeavors, Plautus and Terence constructed a moral code based on the notion that men should acquire property and aspire to higher social status. Men should be productive, enterprising individuals with little thought to leisurely activities and should certainly not foster frivolous emotional attachments. To do so was not merely frowned upon, it was considered contrary to the moral integrity of the upstanding Roman man. Moreover, collecting and properly administering personal property was the foundation of *auctoritas*. Therefore, the moral code of Roman comedy and the necessary prerequisites for attaining *auctoritas* dovetailed perfectly.

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<sup>30</sup> Plautus, *Casina*, p. 27, l. 239-240. See also, Plautus, *Stichus*, 67.

## Section II: Civic Duty

It should come as no surprise that since a man's *auctoritas* was completely dependent on his standing in the community, one of the best ways a man could gain *auctoritas* was to exhibit a strong sense of civic duty. The key part of that sentence is "exhibit," since at no point does anyone in any of the works of Plautus and Terence actually act on their sense of civic duty or do something constructive for their community. Perhaps the best expression of this idea comes from the prologue of Plautus's *Truculentus*:

*Perparvam partem postulat Plautus loci de vestries magnis  
atque amoenis moenibus, Athenas quo sine architectis  
conferat. quid nunc? daturin estis an non? adnuont. scio rem  
quidem urbis me ablaturum sine mora; quid si de vostro  
quippiam orem? abnuont. eu hercle in vobis resident mores  
pristine, ad denegandum ut celeri lingua utamini.*

Within the precincts of your great and gracious city 'tis but a tiny tract that Plautus asks, whereto he may bring Athens without the aid of engineers. Well now? Will you give it him or not? They nod assent. Hm! Public property is mine for the taking, I observe. Now what if I beg a grant from your private means? They nod dissent. Ah, how stoutly you maintain the grand old customs, with your swift eloquence in saying "No."<sup>31</sup>

This is an example of the imbedded in all the works of Roman comedy: public works and civic duty should always be promoted, but never at the expense of private property.

Part of maintaining the appearance of civic duty was avoiding falling into political factions and currying favor with elite patricians. In Plautus's *Three Bob Day*, Megaronides gives a screed about the moral laxity of the general public and comments: *nimioque hic plaris pauciorum gratiam faciunt pars hominum quam id quod prosint pluribus. ita vincunt*

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<sup>31</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 227, l. 1-8.

*illud conducibile gratiae, quae in rebusj multis opstant odiosaeque sunt remoramque faciunt rei privatae at publicae.* “We have a crowd here that gives lots more consideration to currying favor with a certain clique than to our general welfare. So expedience is sacrificed to this favor-currying that’s almost incessantly obstructive and odious and inimical to the common interest, private and public.”<sup>32</sup> This was a very important communal value. If the entire community were to begin concentrating power in the hands of the very few, personal authority would become bound up with governmental authority.<sup>33</sup> In order to continue the practice of *auctoritas* and not let it get folded into governmental authority, extreme factionalism was to be avoided.

Civic duty also came before family in certain instances. In Plautus’s *Amphitryon*, Zeus, pretending to be Alcmena’s husband, Amphitryon, says as he is leaving her, *Nunc, ne legio persentiscat, clam illuc redeundum est mihi, ne me uxorem praevertisse dicant prae re publica.* “Now I must slip back, so that my men may not get wind of this and say I put my wife ahead of the public welfare.”<sup>34</sup> The public superseded the family because, as will be seen in Chapter 2, the family outside of the *paterfamilias* constituted a piece of the father’s/husband’s property. While a man had to provide for and properly oversee his family to maintain and gain *auctoritas*, the community bestowed *auctoritas* and therefore posturing for the public came before all else, with regards to gaining personal authority.

The civic duty aspect of *auctoritas* existed as a self-perpetuating corollary to the whole system. On the one hand, it promoted localized, personal authority over executive,

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<sup>32</sup> Plautus, *Trinummus*, p. 103, l. 34-38.

<sup>33</sup> Which one could argue is most certainly the case in the actual Roman world. However, in Roman comedy, personal authority and governmental authority were kept separate except in the case of punishing criminals. For a comprehensive examination of the interplay between governmental and personal punishment in Roman comedy, see Kathleen McCarthy, *Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in Plautine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Plautus, *Amphitryon*, p. 55, l. 526-527.



concentrated, top-down authority; and on the other, it encouraged being active in the community and ensured that each successive generation would continue the process of jockeying for *auctoritas*. This aspect of Roman personal authority was almost assuredly what Hannah Arendt was referring to when she proclaimed *auctoritas* an “act of foundation [which] inevitably develops its own stability and permanence.”<sup>35</sup>

### Section III: Gender Profiling

In Roman comedy, much as in the wider Roman world, gender roles were sharply defined. Unlike the extreme ambiguity of Roman sexuality (which will be discussed in Chapter 3), the Romans employed a simple binary opposition of gender roles. To be male is to be the opposite of female, and vice versa.<sup>36</sup> Thus defined, this means that any activity deemed “unmanly” was necessarily “womanly.” Nearly all activities deemed unacceptable for a man to do were inherently wrapped into the gender profile of “unmanly,” even things that, at first glance, would appear to have no relation to the gender of the offender. Extravagant spending, overt attention to appearance or even the desire to be sexually appealing, cowardice, all were gendered as though they were specifically feminine traits. Of course, any man acting in any way womanish could expect a considerable loss of communal standing, as women could not possess substantial *auctoritas*. Moreover, as in all things involving *auctoritas*, territoriality is at the heart of the issue.

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<sup>35</sup> See page 2.

<sup>36</sup> Some have argued that Roman gender roles were just as ambiguous as sexuality, but Roman comedy takes a very black and white stance toward the idea of gender and at no point do any so-called “gender deviants” make an appearance in Plautine or Terentian comedy. For a discussion of the various stances on gender in the Roman world, see Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, trans. by Cormac Cuilleannain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

The primary negative component of the male character that could be gendered as womanly was cowardice. In Plautus's *Bacchides*, when Cleomachus finds out his wife has been lying in the arms of another man, he angrily cries:

*Non me arbitratur militem, sed mulierem, qui me meosque non  
queam defendere. nam neque Bellona mi umquam neque Mars  
creduat, ni illum exanimalem faxo, si convenero, nive  
exheredem fecero vitae suae.*

He takes me for a woman, not a soldier, a woman unable to defend myself and mine! Now never may Belonna and Mars trust me more, unless I extinguish his vital spark, once I come upon him, and unless I disinherit him of his existence!<sup>37</sup>

Even here, the issue of property comes to the fore. Cleomachus is not angry because his wife has been unfaithful, he is angry because another man has dared encroach upon his territory (his wife) and has made the erroneous assumption that Cleomachus is womanly in that he cannot defend what is rightfully his. Thus the insult of womanly behavior is, at its core, an insult designed to imply that a Roman man was not capable of effectively managing or defending his territory or belongings and therefore not worthy of *auctoritas*.

Ironically, being considered a “lady’s man” could actually incur the insult of “womanly,” though out of genuine gender characterization or simple jealousy, one can only imagine. In Plautus's *Truculentus*, Stratophanes finds out that his paramour is seeing another man and asks, *holerum atque escarum et poscarum, moechum malacum, cincinnatum, umbraticulum, tympanotribam amas, hominem non nauci?* “Canst thou...deign to love a soft seducer with crinkled locks, an indoorsportsman, a thrummer of the tambourine, a makeshift

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<sup>37</sup> Plautus, *Bacchides*, l. 844-888.

of a male?”<sup>38</sup> If more than a simple jibe at another man’s expense, this is clearly read as an indictment of any pursuits that took men away from more productive activities.

Being considered to behave in a womanly fashion carried a large penalty to *auctoritas* due to the inherent assumption that womanish men could not administrate their personal belongings. Cowardly men could not be expected to protect their territory. Also woman-chasing, playing music, attending to one’s hair, all implied a man more concerned with random distractions than properly attending to his own property.

#### Section IV: Conclusion

The most necessary component for any man to attain *auctoritas* was a strong Roman character. Moreover, every aspect of the ideal Roman character contributed to the image of a man capable of ruling his personal kingdom and defending it from all comers. First, a good Roman man possessed powerful moral fortitude in that he abstained from all extravagances, largely characterized in Roman comedy as spending and women (the two often went hand-in-hand). Also, a man of sound character must exhibit a strong sense of civic duty. While this did not exactly fit the pattern of reinforcing the importance of property rights, fostering a strong sense of civic duty created a feedback loop that maintained the entire system of *auctoritas*. Finally, any man aspiring to hold personal authority could not afford to be labeled as womanish. Women were merely pieces of property for men and exhibiting the characteristics of them meant one was incapable of administering an estate.

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<sup>38</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, l. 609-611. The “indoorsportsman” crack may be an allusion to the homosexuality which pervaded the indoor sports arenas, the infamous gymnasiums.

### Chapter 3

#### *Auctoritas* and Personal Relationships

#### Introduction

This chapter will explore the relationship between a man's *auctoritas* and his personal attachments. As figurative pieces of a man's property, his family must be effectively administrated, provided for, and appropriately punished should the situation arise for them to reflect well on a man and contribute to his personal authority. Personal relationships outside the family are rarely depicted in Roman comedy, excepting, of course, the relationship a man has with prostitutes. Prostitutes served a singular purpose in the comedies of Plautus; they were leeches and succubae, existing only to emphasize the moral degradation of the men who visited them. In Terence, some prostitutes were characterized as loving companions but more often they conformed to the greedy leach stereotype. Regardless of the playwright, prostitutes could only have a diminishing effect on the *auctoritas* of men. While no man in all of Roman comedy is genuinely chastised for possessing a powerful sexual appetite, men who wasted money on such a needless extravagance as women were subject to censure, ridicule, and a significant penalty to personal authority.

There exist many studies on the Roman family dynamic. Unfortunately, most of them either focus on the Empire (Treggiari, 1991 and Veyne, 1978) or do not utilize the comedies of Plautus and Terence in their research (Rawson, 2003).<sup>39</sup> This is especially

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<sup>39</sup> S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: iusti coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1991). Paul Veyne, "La Famille et l'amour sous le haut-empire romain," *Annales: economies*,

strange in the case of Rawson's work, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*. Rawson either quotes or references other Roman poets extensively (Juvenal, Ovid, Propertius) and yet only mentions Plautus once, in a footnote, and mentions Terence not at all.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps these researchers were daunted by the ambiguous task of separating Greek from Roman social phenomena. Moreover, these studies do not consider how personal authority influences, and is in turn influenced by, the family.

### Section I: Marriage

The relationship between husband and wife is extremely significant in Roman comedy. The stock wife character is a mistrustful, calculating shrew that hounded her husband endlessly with suspicion and was often rewarded by finding that her suspicions were well founded. There are exceptions to this rule, but from a structural standpoint the wife typically acted as an impediment to the desires of the protagonist (be it her husband or son). Multiple plays take as the motivation for the entire plot a husband attempting something without his wife taking notice. As such, often wives serve as lynchpins of their husbands' *auctoritas*. Either the husband's will is achieved and his hegemony remains intact or his wife prevails and the husband is appropriately emasculated in front of the audience. A husband incapable of exerting dominion over his wife and even being subordinated to her is a terribly humiliating thing for a Roman man to bear, second only to being raped. Moreover, in the

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*societies, civilizations*, 1978, v. 33: 35-63. Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Rawson even admits that she did not fully investigate literary sources: "The evaluation of literature more generally for its representations of children and childhood would repay greater attention than I have been able to give it in this book. There has been much new work in Latin literary criticism in recent years, and although I have found it stimulating I do not have the expertise to take full advantage of it." This does not explain the inclusion of such writers as Ovid and Juvenal and the conspicuous absence of Plautus and Terence. Rawson, *Children and Childhood*, 3.

realm of *auctoritas*, women act as part of a man's territory (as either daughters or wives). A man being ruled by his own property is a grave offense that carries a powerful stigma. As has been shown in the last chapter, intemperance is the great sin of Roman drama and indulging a wife is no different than indulging in wine or luxury; it will nearly always bring a man to ruin.

Wives in Roman comedy were often characterized as necessary annoyances. They had precious few rights or existent authority so they made use of what they were left with: the right to nag. Women could own property but there was clearly a pervasive attitude that whatever a wife owned, she should turn over to her husband. Chides one wife to another in Plautus's *Casina*:

*Nam peculi probam nil habere addecet clam virum, et quae habet, partum ei haud commode es, quin viro aut sabtrahat aut stupor invenerit. hoc viri censeo esse omne, quidquid tuum est.*

For a modest wife oughtn't to have any private property unbeknown to her husband, and a wife that does hasn't come by it properly—without robbing him or wronging him, one or the other. In my opinion all that's yours is your husband's.<sup>41</sup>

By restricting their wives' ability to own property, Roman men avoided confronting fiefdoms within their own households. Husbands could also initiate divorce simply by throwing their wives out. The same pious wife previously quoted from *Casina* also advised: *semper tu huic verbo vitato abs tuo viro...Ei foras, mulier*. "There's one thing you should always beware of your husband's saying to you... 'Woman, leave my house.'"<sup>42</sup> Men used

<sup>41</sup> Plautus, *Casina*, p. 21, l. 198-202.

<sup>42</sup> Plautus, *Casina*, p. 23, l. 207-210. Wives could also indirectly initiate divorce proceedings, but only by appealing to their fathers and convincing them that they cannot possibly reconcile with their husbands, as the wife of Menaechmus attempted to do in Plautus's *Menaechmi*: *Non, inquam, patiar praeterhac, quin vidua vivam quam tuos mores perferam...Ne istuc mecator—iam patrem accersam meum atque ei narrabo tua flagitia quae facis*. "I will not put up with it any longer, I tell you. I'll get a divorce rather than tolerate your

the threat of divorce as a means to quell particularly disagreeable or suspicious wives. In *The Two Menaechmuses* by Plautus, Menaechmus becomes so exhausted by his wife's harping that he pronounces: *praeterhac si mihi tale post hunc diem faxis, faxo foris vidua visas patrem*. "Now mark my words, if you act like this toward me after today, you shall hie yourself home to your father as a divorcee."<sup>43</sup> Even wives pleading with their fathers about mistreatment at the hands of their husbands fell on rather deaf ears. Menaechmus's wife, mistaking her husband's twin brother for her husband, complains about her husband's misdeeds to her father:

*Senex: Quotiens monstravi tibi, viro ut morem geras, quid ille faciat, ne id observes, quo eat quid rerum great.*

*Matrona: At enim ille hinc amat meretricem ex proxumo.*

*Senex: Sane sapit, atque ob instanc industriam etiam faxo amabit amplius.*

Father: How many times have I explicitly told you to humor your husband and not keep watching what he does, where he goes, and what he is about?

Wife: Well, but he makes love to this strumpet, the very next door!

Father: He shows excellent judgment, and he will make love to her all the more, I warrant you, to reward this diligence of yours.<sup>44</sup>

As the previous quotes indicate, divorce was a process of one man returning a piece of property to another. The husband relinquishes authority over the woman as his wife and

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goings-on...I'll send for my father this moment and I'll give him an account of your outrageous actions!" Plautus, *Menaechmi*, p. 439, l. 725-735.

<sup>43</sup> Plautus, *Menaechmi*, p. 375, l. 112-113.

<sup>44</sup> Plautus, *Menaechmi*, p. 445, l. 788-791.

she reverts back to the territory of her father. The acquiring, maintaining, and returning wives in Plautine and Terentian comedy serves as a commodification process for women. One could say there is an economic system in place for determining the value of a marriage in social currency. Roman men agree to give up some measure of freedom in order to receive a wife but, should that wife become too costly in terms of personal freedoms or loss of *auctoritas* through henpecking and open disregarding of the husband's dominion, then the marriage is no longer economically viable and the wife should be returned to her father. Of course, the dowry that came with new brides offered a more literal economic incentive for marriage. While debating over the choice between prospective wives, a man admits in Terence's *Phormio*: *Sed mi opus erat, ut aperte tibi nunc fabuler, aliquantulum quae afferet qui dissolverem quae debeo*. "But, to be quite frank with you, I needed a wife who could bring with her a bit of money to pay off my debts."<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately for the husbands of Roman comedy, money more frequently flowed away from them than to them. The relationship between husbands and wives was very often depicted as a monetary bargain. Men promised to keep their wives in a good supply of money and luxuries and in return, wives should be content and leave their husbands to their own devices. In *Menaechmi*, one of the eponymous characters tells his wife:

*Quando ego tibi ancillas, penum, lanam, aurum, vestem,  
purpuram bene praebo nec quicquam eges, malo cavebis si  
sapis, virum observare desines.*

Inasmuch as I keep you well provided with maids, food, wollen [sic] clothing, jewelry, coverlets, purple dresses, and you lack for nothing, you will look out for trouble if you're wise, and cease spying on your husband.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Terence, *Phormio*, p. 85-87, l. 654-658.

<sup>46</sup> Plautus, *Menaechmi*, p. 375-377, l. 120-122.



It would seem that the negative connotation attached to extravagance did not extend into the realm of husbands keeping their wives happy. Some men went so far as to claim that their entire purpose for working was to keep their wives content, as Laches did in Terence's *Hecyra*: *rus habitatum abii concendens vobis et rei serviens, sumptus vestros otiumque ut nostra res posset pati, meo labori haud parcens praeter aequom atque aetatem meam*. "I went away to live in the country out of consideration for you and to look after our estate, so that our income could support your expenditure and your life of leisure."<sup>47</sup> There is a simple explanation why extravagance was allowed for the purpose of keeping wives happy: it was viewed as a necessary expenditure in the course of a man administering his territory. Indeed, more than just an expenditure, a man providing his wife with finery was often construed as his central marriage obligation. In *Menaechmi*, after the wife of Menaechmus has unsuccessfully implored her father to intercede because Menaechmus has been sleeping with another woman and drinking at her house, there follows this exchange:

*Senex: Si ille quid deliquerit, multo tanto illum accusabo, quam te accusavi, amplius. quando te auratam et vestitam bene habet, ancillas penum recte praehibet, melius sanam est, mulier, mentem sumere.*

*Matrona: At ille suppiat mihi aurum et pallas ex arcis domo, me despoliat, mea ornamenta clam ad meretrices degerit.*

*Senex: Male facit, si istuc facit; si non facit, tu male facis, quae insontem insimules.*

Father: If he has done anything out of the way, I shall be a great deal more severe with him than I have been with you. But inasmuch as he keeps you well supplied with jewelry and

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<sup>47</sup> Terence, *Hecyra*, p. 167-169, l. 224-226. A further example of this exists in Terence's *Phormio*. At the end of the play, it is revealed that Chremes has secretly been supporting two families and this provides the motivation for him to constantly be away on business. Terence, *Phormio*, p. 123-137, l. 941-1055.

clothes, furnishes you with plenty of maidservants and provisions, you had better be sensible about things, my girl.

Wife: But he filches my jewelry and mantles from my chest at home, he robs me, and carries my nicest things to strumpets on the sly!

Father: He does wrong, if he does that; if he doesn't, you are doing wrong to accuse an innocent man.<sup>48</sup>

This passage is a continuation of the earlier quoted exchange between the father and daughter from *Menaechmi*. In the previous passage, we saw the father's response to his daughter's complaints that her husband slept with prostitutes and drank at their houses: a droll quip about the husband cheating all the more because of his wife's fretting. His tone was of indifference and mild annoyance. The father was apathetic to his daughter's plight and implied the trouble was all her fault. But the latter passage, the daughter brings up a different complaint; that her husband is taking expensive items meant for her and giving them to other women. Though still suspicious that his daughter may be ultimately to blame, the father takes this complaint far more seriously. This vignette illuminates two points about marriage and *auctoritas* in Roman comedy. Firstly, husbands were obligated to provide their wives with sufficient luxury to appease them or risk being judged in the community as unable to provide for their own households. Secondly, a husband visiting prostitutes at the expense of his wife was certainly a censured act.

Interestingly, simply carrying on extramarital affairs or seeing prostitutes brought no loss of personal authority on husbands. Sex outside of marriage was commonplace in the plays of Plautus and Terence and rarely drew negative judgment from anyone save jealous

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<sup>48</sup> Plautus, *Menaechmi*, p. 445-447, l. 778-806.

wives. In the epilogue of the *Asinaria* by Plautus, near the end of which a husband is discovered by his wife cavorting in a brothel, the entire cast says: *Hic senex si quid clam uxorem suo animo fecit volup, neque novum neque mirum fecit nec secus quam alii solent*. “If this old gentleman has indulged his inclinations a bit without informing his wife, he has done nothing new or strange, or different from what other men ordinarily do.”<sup>49</sup> As has already been seen in the example of Menaechmus’s wife and her father, men rarely found fault in other men for taking part in extramarital affairs, even at the expense of their own daughters. In Terence’s *Hecyra* Myrrina points out to her husband, Phidippus, that their son-in-law has kept mistresses since before he married their daughter; Phidippus replies: *multo prius scivi quam tu illum habere amicam, Myrrina. verum id vitium numquam decrevi esse ego adolescentiae. nam id innatmst*. “I knew he had a lover long before you did, Myrrina. But I’ve never considered this a vice in a young man. It’s natural.”<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, there are scarce few instances in which the label of adulterer was even cast about in Roman comedy. One such example exists in Plautus’s *Miles Gloriosus*. In this play, the titular braggart warrior, Pyrgopolynices, falls for a ruse perpetrated by slaves to bring about his downfall. Pyrgopolynices is convinced by these slaves that a neighboring woman desires him and has recently divorced. Taking the bait, the warrior goes after the woman, only to be found out by the woman’s husband and subsequently dragged into the street and beaten. The point to take from this vignette is that Pyrgopolynices was branded an adulterer despite not being married; the indication being that an adulterer was someone who induced a wife to stray, whether or not said person was married himself. Thus adultery only occurred when one man sexually transgressed the territorial boundaries of another man, i.e.,

<sup>49</sup> Plautus, *Asinaria*, p. 229, l. 942-943.

<sup>50</sup> Terence, *Hecyra*, p. 203, l. 541-543.

sleeping with his wife. Clearly, sex itself was not depicted as the direct object of any sort of communal morality. Rather, sex acted as any other commodity a man might indulge in and therefore it was treated by Roman comedy as such: something not to be overindulged in to the point of excess, but not harmful or shameful.

The institution of marriage existed in Roman comedy as the litmus tests for *auctoritas* and masculine territoriality. For Roman men, wives and the assets they brought with them to the marriage as a dowry constituted the first building blocks of their personal territory and therefore the foundation of personal authority. However, properly controlling and appeasing their wives was central to maintaining communal esteem; being unable to manage or satiate a wife brought with it hefty penalties to *auctoritas* for a Roman husband. A quiet and obedient wife indicated a well-run household and a man worthy of esteem. Essentially, as long as a Roman wife did nothing to harm her husband's reputation, she helped it.

## Section II: Prostitution

Prostitutes figure strongly in the plays of Plautus and Terence. They are depicted as insatiably greedy with no moral compunction about stripping men of any material wealth at all costs. Conversely, they also act as healthy outlets for male affection and are often characterized as the true love interests in plays as opposed to the shrewish, unpleasant wives. Prostitutes also play an important role in the realm of *auctoritas*. They are the test of a man's will to maintain personal control and resist the temptation of extravagance. As has already been mentioned, visiting prostitutes was not problematic for Roman men, but indulging too

much in them to the detriment of more important matters constituted the crime of intemperance and necessitated communal censure.

First, defining prostitution in the Roman world is an essential component of understanding prostitutes in Roman comedy. Slavery was pervasive in Rome (as evinced by the fact that every play ever written by Terence and Plautus involves at least one slave and usually more) and having sex with one's slaves was entirely permissible and a generally accepted expectation of Roman society. Therefore, if a man wanted easy sex outside of marriage, he need only look in his own home for able, if constrained, partners. Intuitively, this had a bifurcation effect on the market for prostitution. Though they are not mentioned specifically in the plays, one can assume there were women (and men) selling themselves for whatever they could get—desperation prostitutes. These were people that sold themselves so cheaply that sex with them was more cost effective than buying a slave and maintaining it, even though the slave carries the added benefit of being a servant. But not everyone who dabbled in the flesh trade lived in desperation.

Those of the second type were career prostitutes, the ones that practiced prostitution by choice and not because of circumstance. These were women (all named prostitutes in Plautus and Terence are women, but there were most likely male prostitutes as well) who wanted to have wealth and luxuries without a husband providing for them. There are multiple examples of these women and they often live extravagant lifestyles and owned property comparable to that of their male clients. Nearly every prostitute mentioned in the plays owns her own house.<sup>51</sup> They have their own maidservants and Erotium from Plautus's

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<sup>51</sup> *nam mihi haec meretrix quae hic habet, Phronesium*. "Now here's my case—this courtesan that lives in there [indicating a house], Phronesium." Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 233, l. 77. The *meretrix* Bacchis says near the end of Terence's *Hecyra*: *nam memini abhinc mensis decem fere ad me nocte prima confugere anhelantem domum sine comite, vini plenum, cum hoc anulo*. "I remember that night about ten months ago he came rushing into my

*Menaechmi* even has her own cook.<sup>52</sup> They had an extremely high quality of life that indicates a considerable income

These were of a completely different demeanor than the common street-walking types and they offered more services. If anyone can buy a sex slave that doubles as a house servant, why would anyone pay significant amounts of money for just sex? This type of Roman prostitute, the *meretrix*, sold love. They sold affection so genuine that Roman men paid for it. More than selling their own affection, they made men love them. Courtesans blurred the line between girlfriend and prostitute to the point that the two were indistinguishable in Roman comedy. The interactions between Diniarchus and the meretrix Phronesium in Plautus's *Truculentus* offer a perfect example of the Roman courtesan's business strategy. At the beginning of the play, Diniarchus laments his dismal situation as a man ruined by his love for a courtesan:

*itidem si amator id quod oratur dedit atque est benignus potius  
quam frugi bonae, si semel amoris poculum accepit meri eaque  
intra pectus se penetravit potio, extemplo et ipse periit et res  
et fides. si iratum scortumst forte amatori suo, bis perit amator  
ab re atque ab animo simul; sin alter altri propitiust, idem  
perit; si raras noctes ducit, ab animo perit; sin crebas ducit,  
ipse gaudet, res perit.*

A lover's in the same fix—let him give what's begged for and be liberal instead of thrifty, let him once drain that cup of undiluted love and feel the draught deep down within him, and instantly he's lost, he and his fortune and his credit. In case the

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house as night fell, out of breath, all by himself, the worse for wine, with this ring." Terence, *Hecyra*, p. 233, l. 822-824. In *The Two Menaechmuses*, Menaechmus says to the meretrix Erotium: *Iube igitur tribus nobis apud te prandium accurarier atque aliquid scitamentorum de foro opsonarier*. "Well, then, have luncheon prepared for three of us at your house, and have some real delicacies purchased at the forum." Plautus, *Menaechmi*, p. 387, l. 208-209.

<sup>52</sup> The stage directions indicate that the courtesan Phronesium enters accompanied by her maid servants at the beginning of Act II, scene 5. Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 269. Also, one of the characters, Astaphium, is a servant of Phronesium. In *Menaechmi*, after the request quoted in the last footnote, Erotium says: *evocate intus Culindrum mihi coquom actutum foras*. "Call my cook Cylindrus out here at once." Plautus, *Menaechmi*, p. 387, l. 218.

hussy chances to get angry at her lover, the lover's a double wreck, in fortune and in peace of mind together. Yet if all goes smoothly with them, he's still a wreck: having her seldom, his peace of mind is wrecked; having her often, he's happy; but his fortune wrecked.<sup>53</sup>

Despite Diniarchus's insightful conclusions about the fate of men who spend too much time with courtesans, he happily sweeps her into his arms later in the play:

*Phon.: Complectere*

*Din.: Lubens. heia, hoc est melle dulci dulcius. hoc tuis fortunes, Iuppiter, praestant.*

*Phron.: Dan savium?*

*Din.: Immo vel decem.*

*Phron.: Em istoc pauper es: semper plus pollicere quam ego abs te postulo.*

*Din.: Vtinam a principio rei item parsisses meae ut nunc reparcis saviis.*

*Phron.: Si quid tibi compendi facere possim, factum edepol velim.*

Phron.: Take me in your arms.

Din.: Gladly! Ah-h-h! This is sweeter than sweet honey! This, oh Jupiter, is where thy lot falls short of mine!

Phron.: Can't I have a kiss? A kiss?

Din.: Yes, and make it ten!

Phron.: There! That's why you're poor: you persist in proffering more than I plead for.

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<sup>53</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 229-231, l. 40-50.

Din.: I only wish you had been as sparing of my purse in the first place as you are of kisses now.

Phron.: If I could possibly save you anything, oh, I wish I could!<sup>54</sup>

The contradictory nature of these passages is quite amazing. On the one hand, Diniarchus knew he would be ruined by seeing Phronesium so much and that even if he won her favor, he could only see her so much because she had other men to see. Also, the strange confluence of love and economics is bewildering in this scene. Both parties are completely aware that this is an economic arrangement; Diniarchus is barred from Phronesium's door unless he brings expensive gifts and they both openly joke at the end of the passage about the cost of their trysting to Diniarchus. And yet there are moments of true emotion between the lovers. Later in the play, Phronesium explains her entire plan to entrap a soldier to marriage for his money to Diniarchus for no reason except: *tibi mea consilia summa semper credidi*. "You're the man I've always trusted my plans to."<sup>55</sup> Diniarchus has no place in Phronesium's plan, she has no reason to tell him except that he asked.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, a few lines later Phronesium says, *Vbi illud quod volo habebō ab illo, facile inveniam quo modo divortium et discordiam inter nos parem: post id ego tecum, mea voluptas, usque ero assiduo*. "After I've got what I want from him, I'll easily find some way of dissolving our happy home in discord. Then after that, my dearest one, you'll always have me for evermore

<sup>54</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 263, l. 370-376.

<sup>55</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 265, l. 388.

<sup>56</sup> One could argue that Phronesium's explaining her plan to Diniarchus is an important plot point due to that fact that it turns out Phronesium is using Diniarchus's child as bait to trap the soldier and she must convince him to let her keep the child just long enough to keep up the ruse. However, even if one chalks up this instance of *meretrix* kindness to a plot device by Plautus, there are other situations where courtesans act outside of their self-interest and help their lovers. For instance, Bacchis in Terence's *Hecyra* explains that her lover, Pamphilus, is in fact the father of a child he thought to be someone else's, thus ameliorating the conflict of the play and allowing Pamphilus and his wife to reconcile. So there is a clear precedent for selfless acts among prostitutes and genuine emotion between courtesans and men.



beside you.”<sup>57</sup> This, of course, could be pandering by Phronesium to keep her best customer in the fold even after she gets married to the unwitting soldier. However, Diniarchus’s love is beyond doubt. He is completely taken in by the words of Phronesium and exits the scene exclaiming: *pro di immortales, non amantis mulieris, sed sociae unanimantis, fidentis fuit officium facere quod modo haec fecit mihi...scio mi infidelem numquam, dum vivat, fore. egone illam ut non amem?* “Ye immortal gods! She’s more than my loving girl, she’s my mutual-hearted, trustful little pal to treat me as she treated me just now...She’ll never in all her life be faithless with me, I know that. Ah, and I, shouldn’t I love her?”<sup>58</sup>

This harkens back to something mentioned in the first chapter: Romans looked askance at overt emotional attachment and this scenario is why. With courtesans constantly angling for men to ensnare, any man with unguarded emotions could easily be caught in a web of love, lust, and lost fortunes. Therein lay the danger to a man’s *auctoritas*. A man besotted with love and incapable of making rational decisions was likely to part with large sums of money and gifts that would otherwise have stayed in his home for his wife and children. Such extravagance on such a trivial thing as love brought harsh scorn from the public. Diniarchus’s own slave, Cyamus, bemoans this very fate at one point in the play, saying: *mereticem ego item esse reor, mare u test: quod des devorat nec datis unquam abundant...velut haec meretrix meum erum miserum sua blanditia paene intulit in pauperiem: privabit bonis, luce, honore atque amicis*. “The sea and harlots are a lot alike, as I see it. All you give she gobbles up: give—give—there’s no overflow...Now look at this

<sup>57</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 267, l. 419-421.

<sup>58</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 269, l. 434-441.

harlot that's almost beggared my poor master with her blandishments: she'll strip him of fortune, honor, position and friends.”<sup>59</sup>

Prostitution combined two great dangers to a man's *auctoritas*: public affection and frivolous expenditure. Men who expressed too much affection for women were not in possession of themselves. Men who spent too much money for the company of women made poor monetary decisions. Loving a prostitute and showering her with money and gifts brought these two offenses together and made a man truly despised in his community.

### Section III: Conclusion

A man's personal relationships were a major determining factor in his public standing and therefore his *auctoritas*. A wife constituted the cornerstone of a man's personal fiefdom; her behavior and standing in the community directly reflected on her husband's ability to exert dominion over his territory. Alternately, a man's relationship with prostitutes reflected his control over himself. Visiting prostitutes in and of itself posed no moral quandary or social taboo, but enjoying the company of prostitutes to the detriment of a man's fortune and ability to provide for his family represented the grave offense of extravagance and a corresponding loss of personal authority.

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<sup>59</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 283, l. 568-573.

## Chapter 4

### Physical Expressions of *Auctoritas*: Sex, Violence, and Everything in Between

#### Introduction

*Auctoritas* physically manifested itself in two main forms in Roman comedy: sex and violence. As will be shown, the line between those two concepts was often blurry if it existed at all in Roman comedy. Moreover, both represented the visceral manifestation of the constant struggle for territory always at play in Plautus and Terence. Men beat slaves to express their physical dominance over them as pieces of property or beat other men as punishment for encroaching upon their territory or despoiling their property. Men used sex in nearly the same way, to display physical dominance over others; though, due to the rules of *auctoritas*, acceptable sexual partners were much more limited in the Roman world than in the Greek.

Sources specifically analyzing violence in the Roman world tend to frame their arguments in specific contexts instead of considering the wider significance of violence to the nature of Roman social interaction.<sup>60</sup> Sexuality has been the single largest topic of discussion in classicism of the last half-century. Some are simply studies of sexuality that do not strongly adhere to a specific side of the debate (Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self*), while others operate with a clear nod to feminism and

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Gaddis, *There is No Crime for Those who have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), also John Wesley Heaton, *Mob Violence in the Late Roman Republic 133-49* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939).

essentialism theory (Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, Hallett and Skinner, *Roman Sexualities*), and yet others adhere to a postmodern, constructionist view of sexuality (Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*).<sup>61</sup> No matter the slant of the text, each study is a work of excellent research, analysis, and sparkling prose. Williams' *Roman Homosexuality* draws most liberally from Roman comedy, but all of them at least mention Plautus and Terence, and all of them explore the issues raised by the complexity of Roman sexual mores.

### Section I: Masculine Sexual Impulses

As Galinsky said in the quote in the introduction, “continual activity of the kind that merits and validates one’s *auctoritas*” was the only way to increase one’s personal authority. One of those activities which validated one’s *auctoritas* was sex. Roman men used sexual penetration as a means of displaying dominance and promoting personal authority. Men were expected to have a healthy sexual appetite and to indulge it, utilizing the proper outlets. Despite all the common assumptions about the Roman propensity for orgies and promiscuity, the plays of Plautus and Terence demonstrated very strong standards concerning who constituted acceptable sexual partners. In Plautus’s *Curculio*, a slave explains: *dum ne per fundum saeptum facias semitam, dum ted abstineas nupta vidua, virgine, iuventute ey pueris liberis, ama quid lubet*. “Provided you keep away from married women, widows, virgins,

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<sup>61</sup> Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Shadi Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), Judith Hallett and Marilyn Skinner, *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality V. III: The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1988), David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

young innocents, and children of respectable families, love anyone you want.”<sup>62</sup> The model of property rights and territoriality as the basis for social mores can easily be seen at work here. Roman ideas of sexual boundaries coincided with property rights. All of those who were untouchable by men belonged to other men in some form or another. Wives belonged to their husbands and unmarried children belonged to their fathers.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, while having sex with one of those deemed untouchable represented a moral transgression in an abstract sense, it literally signified an infringement on the property of another male and it was from this consideration that the action derived its quality of criminality and moral turpitude, as well as a corresponding loss of *auctoritas*.

While men could not indulge in those desires, they still exhibited a vigorous and domineering sexuality. In Plautus’s *Miles Gloriosus*, the eponymous character, Pyrgopolynices, epitomizes the hyper sexed Roman *vir* while talking to his slave about a woman who just arrived in town:

Pyrg.: *Ecquid fortis visat?*

Pal.: *Omni avis optinere.*

Pryg.: *Vbi matrem esse aiebet soror?*

Pal.: *Cubare in navi lippam atque oculis turgidis nauclerus dixit, qui illas advexit, mihi. is ad hos nauclerus hospitio devortitur.*

Pryg.: *Quid is? ecquid fortis?*

Pal.: *Abi sis hinc, nam tu quiden ad equas fuisti scitus admissarius, qui consecrare qua maris qua feminas.*

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<sup>62</sup> Plautus, *Curculio*, 191-193.

<sup>63</sup> *Meretices* are somewhat problematic in this model since technically, as unwed women, they should belong to their fathers. However, one can safely assume they renounced all ties to anyone the moment they decided to sell themselves for money and therefore belonged to no one. One could also say they belonged to themselves. Either way, they were not part of any man’s territory and therefore it was not socially taboo to visit prostitutes. This is the explanation for why prostitution carried no stigma in the Roman world for men, as opposed to today.

Pyrg.: A fine, strapping wench, is she?

Pal.: You want to get hold of everything, sir.

Pyrg.: Where did the sister say the mother was?

Pal.: She's abed the ship sir...according to the skipper who brought them here. He's stopping with these neighbors of ours.

Pyrg.: How about him? A fine, strapping lad is he?

Pal.: Oh now, now, sir! You've certainly been a rare stallion, that's sure, the way you run after everything, male and female.<sup>64</sup>

As the above quote implies, there was no line drawn between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the Roman world. There are innumerable moments in the works of Terrence and Plautus that exemplify this social norm, but one scene in particular illustrates the fluidity of homosexual and heterosexual desire in the Roman world. At one point, in Plautus's *Casina*, a slave, Olympio, and his master, Lysidamus, are discussing a matter in private while another slave, Chalinus, listens in on their conversation. Lysidamus becomes overjoyed when Olympio explains that he has contrived to bring Lysidamus's female lover to him. At first, Lysidamus praises the beauty of his lover but the whole scene suddenly changes direction as Lysidamus makes advances on Olympio, rapturously exclaiming: *Vt, qui ate tango, mel mihi videor lingere*. "Oh, it's like lapping honey, getting my lips on you!"<sup>65</sup> Chalinus, overhearing the conversation, comments: *ecfodere hercle hic volt, credo, vesicam vilico*. "I do believe he wants to dig the bailif's innards out."<sup>66</sup> As abruptly as it began, the non sequitur ends and Lysidamus returns to fantasizing about his female lover. In this particular insertion, the audience is made aware that the main character, Lysidamus, desires

<sup>64</sup> Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*, p. 243-245, l. 1106-1113.

<sup>65</sup> Plautus, *Casina*, 51, l. 458.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, l. 455.

both his female lover and his slave, Olympio. The ease with which the scene transitions from heterosexual to homosexual attraction and back again clearly shows that the Romans were equally comfortable with men exhibiting both forms of sexuality. Indeed, as discussed in the historiography, many scholars have debated whether or not the Romans even had a concept of sexuality or sexual orientations.

If anything approaching the concept of sexual orientation existed in Rome, it was defined by the roles played during sex rather than the gender of the participants. The Roman man always played the dominant, penetrative sexual role. For instance, in Plautus's *Pseudolus*, a man teases the slave of a soldier by saying, *noctu in vigiliam quando ibat miles, quom tu ibas simul, conveniebatne in vaginam tuam machaera militas?* "At night when the warrior went on guard and you went along with him, was his blade a good fit for your scabbard?"<sup>67</sup> Note that the object of scorn in this joke is the slave who played the submissive "scabbard" role, and not the soldier who played the penetrative role. In Roman comedy, any man who played the passive role in a sexual encounter was subject to severely derisive treatment. While this certainly has basic psychological antecedents, this can also be explained in terms of territoriality. Just as sleeping with a man's wife indicates a sexual intrusion into another man's property, a man penetrating another man's body indicates both a literal sexual intrusion and a metaphorical intrusion into a very personal piece of a man's territory: his own body. Any man who could not defend himself from sexual penetration or allowed himself to be sexually penetrated was subject to an extreme loss of standing in his community.

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<sup>67</sup> Plautus, *Pseudolus*, 269, l. 1179-1180.

While there were exceptions, the Roman ideal of masculine sexual desirability was the hairless youth.<sup>68</sup> Often in Plautus and Terence men are reminded of possible transgressions in their youth, as Libanus does to his master, Argyrippus, in a scene from Plautus's *Asinaria*. Libanus wants to be carried on Argyrippus's back and is instructing him to bend over so that Libanus can climb atop him. Libanus says: *asta igitur, ut conseutus es puer olim. scim ut dicam?* "Now then, stand by—the way you used to do years ago as a boy. Know how I mean?"<sup>69</sup> Even without the sly wink to the audience at the end of the line, the allusion is clear. Libanus is insinuating that his master was once involved in a sexual relationship as the passive partner in his younger days. There are also allusions to male child prostitutes in Roman comedy. In *Truculentus* by Plautus, the hopelessly desperate Diniarchus is attempting to negotiate with Astaphium, the maidservant of a *meretrix*, for a visit; but the whole discussion is taking place in farming metaphors. At one point, Astaphium suggests: *Non arvos his, sed pascuost ager: si arationes habituru's, qui arari solent, ad pueros ire meliust. hunc nos habemus publicam illi alii sunt publicani.* "Ours isn't plow-land, it's pasture: if it's plowing you must have, better go to boys for it. They're used to being plowed. We girls do our bit with public land, but they're the real publicans."<sup>70</sup> The Roman form of pederasty, as expressed in the works of Plautus and Terence, is clearly a machination of territoriality. Male children were held up as the ideal of masculine desirability to avoid conflict between grown men. If all Roman men desired other grown men, both would wish to penetrate the other and neither would be willing to play the

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<sup>68</sup> The passage quoted earlier concerning Olympio and Lysidamus ends with a comment that exemplifies just such an exception. At the end of the scene the slave overhearing the whole conversation comments: *Hodie hercle, opinor, hi conturbabunt pedes; solet hic barbatus sane sectari senex.* "Good Lord! I bet those two will be making hot love to each other before long; the old man here always did take to bearded faces, for a fact."

Plautus, *Casina*, p. 53, l. 465-466.

<sup>69</sup> Plautus, *Asinaria*, p. 199, l. 703.

<sup>70</sup> Plautus, *Truculentus*, p. 239, l. 149-151.



submissive role. In pederasty there is clearly a dominant and submissive role built into the practice. Moreover, considering that the limits placed on male sexuality basically limited Roman men to enslaved males and male prostitutes, sex with men often acted as a way for Roman males to assert dominance over their property. This is the key distinction between Greek and Roman forms of pedophilia and what may be loosely termed as “homosexual tendencies.” The Greeks practiced pederasty as a form of bonding and philosophical teaching between an older man and a boy.<sup>71</sup> The Romans had no such notions and practiced pederasty purely as a form of domination and sexual gratification.

Sexuality in Plautus and Terence conformed to the standard rules of *auctoritas*. Men were allowed to have sex with only those who did not belong to other men, basically prostitutes and slaves. Moreover, no lines were drawn between the sexes of those sexual participants. A male slave was just as likely a sexual partner for a Roman man as a female slave, for both were part of his territory and therefore subject to his dominion.

## Section II: Violence

Violence is pervasive throughout the plays of Plautus and Terence. Though never truly brutal and often employed as slapstick comedy, the violence in Roman comedy is still a very interesting aspect of the medium and was intertwined with the ideas and practices of *auctoritas*. In his essay, “Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought,” Jonathan Walters argued,

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<sup>71</sup> For a complete overview of Greek pederasty, see Eva Cantarella and Andrew Lear, *Images of Ancient Greek Pederasty: Boys Were Their Gods* (New York: Routledge, 2008), also David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), also William Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

Some males, because of their low place in the social hierarchy, were not full men and therefore lacked this “manly” characteristic of corporeal inviolability. A Roman social protocol that employed a rhetoric of gender...thus appears to be part of a wider cultural pattern whereby social status was characterized on the basis of perceived bodily integrity and freedom, or the lack of it, from invasion from the outside.<sup>72</sup>

While Walters raises a fine point: social hierarchy directly correlated with the amount of bodily integrity one could expect in the Roman world, that point must be expounded upon to understand all of Roman society rather than just men. Status within one’s community led directly to more corporeal inviolability because higher status indicated higher *auctoritas*. More importantly, a man’s property, such as his wife, slaves, children, farms etc. all contributed to and were protected by that man’s *auctoritas*. Thus they all shared in the inviolability that the man’s *auctoritas* guaranteed for himself.

Violence played into this largely as a signifier of either low *auctoritas* or a loss of *auctoritas* in Roman comedy. Signs of past violence such as whipping or beating scars generally indicated servility or someone of very low bodily inviolability. For instance, in Plautus’s *Amphitryon*, when the god Mercury, pretending to be the slave Sosia, meets the actual Sosia, the slave exclaims: *tam consimilest atque ego...si tergum cicatricosum, nihil hoc similst similius*. “He’s as like me as I am myself...If he’s got a backful of whip scars, you couldn’t find a liker likeness anywhere.”<sup>73</sup> Punishing slaves made up the vast majority of violent instances in Plautus and Terence. In Plautus’s *Asinaria*, two slaves concoct a scheme to relieve a trader of his money whereby one of the slaves pretends to be the master. While the second slave is attempting to haggle with the trader, the first slave pretending to be the master walks up and bellows: *Siquidem hercle nunc summum Iovem te dicas detinuisse*

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Walters, “Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought,” in Judith Hallett and Marilyn Skinner, eds, *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 30.

<sup>73</sup> Plautus, *Amphitryon*, p. 47, l. 443-446.

*atque is precator adsiet, malam rem effigies numquam. tu, verbero, imperium meum contempsisti?* “You can go on and say Jove Almighty detained you, yes, and he can come here and plead your case, but you shall never escape a flogging. You scorned my authority, you whipping post?”<sup>74</sup> The first slave subsequently beats the second slave and knocks him around for the rest of the scene, all as part of their ruse to convince the trader that the first slave is actually a master. Clearly the social archetypes are set: the one who beats is the master and the one who takes the beating is the slave.

There are instances of free men being beaten, but they are rare and happen under unusual circumstances. In Terence’s *Adelpoe*, Aeschinus and his slave, Parmeno, get in a fight with a pimp, Sannio, over a slave-girl that Aeschinus wants as his personal mistress. As Aeschinus and Sannio attempt to pull the girl in different directions, Aeschinus says to his slave:

*accede illuc, Parmeno. nimium istuc abisti. hic propter hunc adsiste. em sic volo. cave nunciam oculos a meis oculis quoquam demoveas tuos, ne mora sit, si innuerim, quin pugnus cotinuo in mala haereat.*

Over here, Parmeno! You’re too far away! Stand right beside him! That’s it! Now make sure you don’t take your eyes off mine. If I nod, don’t wait. Plant your fist in his jaw instantly.<sup>75</sup>

Parmeno goes on to punch the pimp multiple times as Aeschinus wrestles the slave-girl away. This is an especially striking scene considering Parmeno, a slave, punches Sannio, a free man. However, this is explained by the fact that Sannio, being a pimp, is entitled to very little bodily inviolability and has extremely low *auctoritas*. Therefore, he can be beaten with no communal or legal ramifications.

<sup>74</sup> Plautus, *Asinaria*, p. 167, l. 413-415.

<sup>75</sup> Terence, *Adelpoe*, p. 269, l. 168-171.

Another instance, this time in Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus*, shows that even freeborn men with respectable occupations, such as a soldier, can be beaten in certain situations. After falling for a trap and being caught having sex with a married woman, Pyrgopolynices (the braggart warrior himself) is dragged into the street and beaten in the street by the woman's husband and a multitude of slaves. Afterward, Pyrgopolynices cries:

*Iuro per Iovem et Mavortem, me nociturum nemini, quod ego  
hic hodie vapularim, iureque id factum arbitror; et si intestatus  
non abeo hinc, bene agitur pro noxia.*

I swear by Jupiter and Mars, sir, not to harm a single soul for being cudged here today, and I think I was treated rightly, sir! And if I get away from here without losing my power to bear witness as a man, I'll be getting more than I deserve, sir!<sup>76</sup>

Again, slaves (and one free, very angry husband) beat a free man. But, again, there are mitigating circumstances. Pyrgopolynices had just been caught committing adultery and was subject to a large penalty to his *auctoritas*. His bodily integrity stood forfeit and so the beating was completely legal and publicly sanctioned.

Violence largely acted as a punitive measure in Roman comedy. Those who were subject to violence were of low social standing or had committed an egregious crime. Both had very low *auctoritas* and therefore had very little ability to command their own territory, even the most personal territory: their own bodies. Conversely, those that beat others used violence as a means of validating their own *auctoritas* by dominating others.

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<sup>76</sup> Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*, p. 283, l. 1414-1416.

### Section III: Violence and Sexuality

Men were expected to assert their physical dominance in more ways than simple violence. Rape played an important part in the social hierarchy of Roman comedy and was a tool commonly used by Roman men to assert their dominance over those of lower social standing. Rape was also utilized as a form of punishment. In Plautus's *Aulularia*, Congrio, a slave cook, is threatened with severe punishment by Euclio. Congrio wistfully notes his master's willingness to punish him by saying, "*Ita fustibus sum mollior magis quam ullus cinaedus.*"<sup>77</sup> Paul Nixon translated the reply as, "I've been clubbed till I'm looser than any fancy dancer."<sup>78</sup> While this translation presents the literal meaning of the words, Nixon left out the subtext hinted at by the phrasing. *Cinaedus* is a derogative Latin word commonly used to describe men who enjoy being the submissive partner in sexual relationships with other men. This word also carries the connotation of men who dress, walk, talk, and dance effeminately. While translating *cinaedus* as "fancy dancer" is not necessarily wrong, it fails to adequately convey the word's full meaning. A more accurate modern cognate would be "sissy" or "fag." *Mollior*, a comparative adjective from the stem *mollis*, is here translated as "looser." *Mollis* means soft or pliable, but when applied as an adjective to men it generally means womanly or effeminate. A better translation of *mollior* would therefore be "more effeminate." The verb *fustibus sum*, a first person passive indicative perfect verb form of the noun *fustibus* which indicates a club or staff, literally translates to "I have been clubbed." Roman writers were notorious for describing sexual activity in battle terminology and considering the verb in question evokes a club or staff, the subtext is not hard to recognize.

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<sup>77</sup> Plautus, *Aulularia*, 278.

<sup>78</sup> Plautus, *Aulularia*, 279.

Having scrutinized the original Latin, a translation which more fully encapsulates the intended meaning of the sentence may be put forth: “I’ve been clubbed until I’m more effeminate than any sissy.” On a superficial level, this is still a statement about the amount of beatings the slave cook received over the years. However, the subtext clearly indicates this slave has been the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of his master as a form of punishment. Likely both meanings are true; the slave probably received both beatings and rape as punishment. This is an indication that the line between physical aggression and sexual aggression was blurry, if it existed at all, in Roman comedy.

Of course, when rape was perpetrated on a freeborn girl instead of a slave, it became the despicable act of a malevolent criminal. In Terence’s *Eunuchus*, a freeborn young girl is entrusted to the care of a eunuch. Chaerea, hearing of this, poses as the eunuch and rapes the girl. Pythias, the girl’s maid, quickly finds out and sends forth a torrent of invectives:

*ubi ego illum scelerosum misera atque impium inveniam? Aut  
ubi quaeram? Hocin tam audax facinus facere ess  
ausum...quin etiam insuper scelus, postquam ludificatust  
virginem, vestem omnem miserae discidit, tum ipsam capillo  
conscidit...qui nunc si detur mihi, ut ego unguibus facile illi in  
oculos involem venefico!*

Oh dear, where can I find that god-forsaken criminal? Where can I look? To think he dared to do such a brazen deed...Why, on top of it all, after he’d had his fun and games with the poor girl, the villain ripped her whole dress and tore her hair...If I get my hands on him, I can’t wait to fly at his face with my nails, the poisonous wretch!<sup>79</sup>

Thus rape is shown to be perhaps the most contemptible form of territorial intrusion. Something is stolen which cannot be replaced. Also, it severely undermined the ability of a man (here, the girl’s father) to protect his own territory.

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<sup>79</sup> Terence, *Eunuchus*, 385-387, l. 643-648.

Plautus and Terence also often set up rape as the ultimate form of intemperance, usually as the result of drinking. In Terence's *Hecyra*, Bacchis explains how she came to know that Pamphilus was the father of his wife's child from before their marriage by saying: *nam memini abhinc mensis decem fere ad me nocte prima confugere anhelantem domum sine comite, vini plenum, cum hoc anulo...homo se fatetur vi in via nescioquam compressisse, dicitque sese illi anulum, dum luctat, detaxisse*. "I remember that night about ten months ago he came rushing to my house as night fell, out of breath, all by himself, the worse for wine, with this ring...the fellow admitted he'd raped some girl in the street, and said he'd snatched the ring off her in the struggle."<sup>80</sup> This play presents a very interesting case; Pamphilus finds out that his wife has had a child while he was away on business, but he has yet to have sex with her so the child cannot be his. However, as revealed in the quote, Pamphilus actually is the father of his own child because he raped his future wife months before they were to be married. Amazingly enough, no one mentions this heinous act at the end of the play and Pamphilus suffers no consequences. Even translator and commentator John Barsby said of the Pamphilus character, "It is hard to sympathize with him when he has committed what must be the most unpleasant rape in comedy and never in the play shows any regret for it."<sup>81</sup> The explanation for this is that all of the rules of territoriality have been satisfied. When it is revealed that Pamphilus raped the girl who became his wife, there is no penalty because he has not harmed a piece of another man's property and therefore suffers no loss of *auctoritas*.

As another example, at the end of *Phormio*, also by Terence, Chremes and his friends are trying to explain to his wife why Chremes should be forgiven for having another family on a far away island and one of Chremes's friends says: *nam neque neglegentia tua neque*

<sup>80</sup> Terence, *Hecyra*, p. 233-235, l. 822-829.

<sup>81</sup> John Barsby, "Introductory Note to *The Mother in Law*," in Terence, *Hecyra*, p. 142.

*odio id fecit tuo. vinolentus fere abhinc annos quindecim mulierculam eam compessit inde haec natast, neque postilla umquam attigit.* “He didn’t do it out of disregard or dislike of you. He forced himself on the poor woman when he was drunk, some fifteen years ago, and the girl was born. But he never touched her after that.”<sup>82</sup> These passages indicate the moralistic repercussions of indulging too much. One extravagance leads to another, as it were. A man out of his wits with wine will be more likely to overindulge his sexual appetite and take a freeborn woman against her will. As that woman is either someone’s wife or someone’s daughter, this is a transgression against another man’s property.

Rape serves multiple functions in the realm of *auctoritas*. While on the one hand, rape can be used to validate and increase personal authority by using it to dominate and punish slaves and other parts of a man’s fiefdom, rape can also destroy a man’s reputation in his community by signifying his inability to control his own emotions and desires.

#### Section IV: Conclusion

As we have seen, men in Roman comedy used violence and sex to police their territory and maintain *auctoritas*. Violence was used either to express dominion over a slave or wife or person of lower standing in the community, or to punish a challenger to a man’s personal authority. Sex was used in the same way, except that freeborn children and women were exempt from the sexual dominion of all Roman males because they were the property of another Roman male (either a father or husband). Sexual violence was sometimes used as a form of punishment and domination, but more often Plautus and Terence characterized rape as a form of wild intemperance, as it constituted the willful intrusion of territorial lines.

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<sup>82</sup> Terence, *Hecyra*, p. 131, l. 1016-1018.



## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

*Auctoritas* was both a major factor in the daily lives of Roman men and in the interactions between the characters of Roman comedy. Men strove to attain higher social standing and with that higher status came *auctoritas*, the quality with which men were imbued that gave them the right to govern their own property and sway the will of the community. However, *auctoritas* was only given by the community; it was not a top-down enforced power structure. One only gained personal authority by presenting himself in a way that merited communal approval. A Roman man did that by conforming to the moral code standardized in Roman comedy: be not slothful or intemperate, but practice probity and sobriety. Men should exhibit a strong sense of civic duty. Also, men should display just as much probity in their personal relationships as in their communal dealings. Men should have well-mannered, virtuous wives and should provide for their families. Men can visit prostitutes without losing standing in the community but it must be within reason; outrageous spending or lavishing of gifts on *meretrices* brought with it a large penalty in *auctoritas*. Finally, men should use the proper channels for expressions of personal authority. Sex can only be with those who do not belong to other men: a man's wife, his slaves, and prostitutes were his only acceptable outlets for sexual gratification. Further, a man can only beat those who he outranks in *auctoritas*: his wife, his slaves, criminals, and social deviants such as pimps. Rape follows the same rules as normal violence when applied to other men, but when

men rape women in Roman comedy, it is often characterized as the worst form of sexual indulgence.

While the territorial underpinnings of *auctoritas* may seem extremely materialistic at first glance, it is decidedly not. Though part of gaining *auctoritas* is gaining material possessions, the decisions one makes about overseeing and distributing those possessions and assets has more to do with *auctoritas* than the actual amount of possessions. Properly administering a larger estate than a smaller one certainly allows for more personal authority, but a rich man does not always automatically have more *auctoritas* than a comparatively poorer man. A rich pimp could never have as much *auctoritas* as a soldier. A wealthy tradesman who spent his days in wild extravagance with wine and women could have less *auctoritas* than an abstemious wheat farmer. Two men of the exact same wealth and who even exhibit the same Roman virtues could have differing levels of *auctoritas* based on other factors. For instance, one could have a quarrelsome, intractable wife who constantly flouts the husband's authority; that man would have less *auctoritas* in the community (and obviously at home) because he cannot control his wife. Thus, there were many factors in determining a man's *auctoritas* and it was not a purely materialistic system of thought.

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### Vita

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